



# Donald Morris/ an analysis

## Intelligence damaged further

The all-but-lifeless American intelligence community is being subjected to fresh attacks. It is hard to imagine what they are supposed to accomplish, since the spectacle resembles what happened to the body of Benito Mussolini after he was shot.

The current area of concern is the connection between the CIA and American journalists, and the two-pronged attack is coming from a brace of New York Times reporters — in a series of articles collected in a telephone program, the bill for which may well exceed the sum of cash paid by the CIA to all American journalists — and from a fresh congressional investigation committee.

This last is chaired by Les Aspin, D-Wis., a legislator with a lust for headlines not seen since the days of Joe McCarthy. Aspin knows even less about intelligence than he does about the military, the field in which he has until now made his name — by an endless series of one-shot accusations of "waste," all of which land his name on the front page and none of which has ever been followed up by a second release, an investigation or remedial legislation.

There is a potential risk in any relation between an overseas intelligence organization and an American newsman: that news appearing in American media may somehow be slanted or even falsified. The Times found no evidence of this, despite reams of copy in which they listed every example they could dredge up of every journalist who would admit to, was re-

ported to or in some cases simply suspected of having had any form of relationship with the CIA.

Aspin hasn't even found that. On several occasions, however, material planted by the CIA in foreign media was picked up by American media. In the old days, the director of Central Intelligence could deal with that problem by calling the media outlet involved, explaining what had happened and having the story killed. As William Colby has testified, such an effective solution to the problem is no longer possible because any such call today would promptly be played up by the outlet involved.

Aspin, naturally, is now talking about "inadequate safeguards" — to a problem which no longer exists, since the CIA's desire (or, indeed, ability) to plant such articles is just about nil.

As usual, the media's towering ignorance of the basic structure of espionage operations, and its loose use of jargon, is coming home to roost. The Times articles are filled with terms like "espionage," "cover," "deep cover," "agent," "asset," "support," "cov-

ert" and "relationship," all of which sound very professional. But since the terms are consistently misapplied and because the writers didn't understand them when they heard them, it is usually difficult and often impossible to puzzle out what they are saying.

In this case, they also use loosely terms like "journalist," "stringer" and "correspondent," so it is even harder to work it out.

To start with basics, CIA personnel are stationed overseas in almost all foreign capitals in "stations" and sometimes in

Part 1 of a 4-part series on the CIA. Donald Morris served with the CIA 17 years. He has been a columnist for The Houston Post since his retirement from government service in 1972.

other cities (which are subsidiary "bases" of the stations). The vast bulk of the people are under "official" (i.e., government) cover, either as State Department employees (although not necessarily diplomats) or civilian employees of the military.

All "official cover" personnel are full-time, career CIA employees. Their job is to recruit "agents," who are foreigners who carry out the actual espionage.

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All "agents" start as leads, who have been spotted, investigated, developed and finally recruited.

All agents sign secrecy agreements and since very few of them wish the relationship advertised, practically none of them ever talks about his experience. Almost everybody, however, who has ever known a CIA official overseas — which includes the vast majority of all journalists — and who has ever spent time with him socially (and discussed current affairs or introduced him to someone), is apt to talk about his "relationship" with the agency, or — especially these days — claim the agency "made a pass at me" or "tried to recruit me."

Since the people involved, and the people writing these stories, are using the terms loosely and interchangeably, nothing very intelligible results.

But all those stories about "relationships" with the CIA sound so thrilling and ominous.